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**Turkey is Working on Armenia
While Russia, on Azerbaijan**

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Turkey is Working on Armenia While Russia, on Azerbaijan

After the more than one-month long intense developments connected with actualizing Armenian-Turkish relations, the talks with respect to shortly achieving success in this initiative now have decreased somewhat. Subsequently, on the road to collaboration, the enthusiasm changed into a cool calculation of the gains and losses of each side. In Armenia, Serzh Sargsyan's "Turkish" course was criticized, as many viewed that this course provided the sole dividends to Turkey and risked Armenia's interests. And different international assessments followed soon thereafter.

For example, the renowned Marshall's Foundation published an analytical paper entitled "Turkey and Armenia Talked, But Can They Walk Together?" The analysis states: "Serzh Sargsyan started a diplomatic reconsolidation game with the Turkish authorities and Levon Ter-Petrosyan, the first president of Armenia, evaluated this game as a 'great and unsubstantiated risk.'" And the analysts draw this general conclusion: Turkey should not shoulder the dark past of the Ottoman Empire while the Armenian diaspora should not think that it can jeopardize—either today, or tomorrow—Armenia in order to close the historical account. That is to say, everyone perceives the depth of the contradictions that have accumulated in relations between the Armenian and Turkish peoples.

It is unnecessary to speak about a quick solution to these contradictions. Apparently, this is why the first phase of the aforesaid enthusiasm ended so fast, but the political and diplomatic life in and around this region did not ease because of it. On the contrary, the passions boiled with a new vigor. It is an altogether different matter that the Turkish diplomatic initiatives have been replaced by American and Russian initiatives—and that the center of diplomatic activity has shifted to Azerbaijan. The visits of international diplomatic circles seem now to have been reduced to mere symbolism: Azerbaijan essentially has been offered free choice between the Russian and Western proposals. It is all too obvious that, in this case, meaningful diplomacy has been replaced by unconcealed bargaining on a variety of issues—and specifically on the issue of Mountainous Karabagh.

Alarmed by the August events in Georgia, Azerbaijan now behaves in a very constrained manner. Furthermore, all hopes that the priority in the resolution of the Karabagh problem will pass to Turkey did not come to fruition. And it is not so easy to choose between the proposals made by the empires since their terms are extremely conflicting. Therefore when the US Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte visited Azerbaijan on October 2, he stated that the United States was in favor of a conflict resolution that was based on territorial integrity and in consideration of other international precepts. But it is difficult to firmly assess the essence of this approach. The aforementioned statement gives Azerbaijan no guarantees that the problem will be resolved in accordance with its views.

The issue is much more complex when it comes to Russia. There are growing rumors that Russia is holding private talks with Azerbaijan concerning Mountainous Karabagh. Even information was disseminated on a specific settlement plan by Russia. In general, this refers to the following steps: 1) The Armenian troops are relocated to the border of former NKAO while the Russian troops are deployed along the entire border; 2) The Lachin Corridor is handed over to Azerbaijan while the Russian troops secure transportation along the corridor; 3) The Armenian troops slowly are removed from Mountainous Karabagh and the latter's police force is deployed there; and, 3) The status of Mountainous Karabagh is discussed at a convenient moment. It is evident by the diplomatic gestures and pronouncements made by the Russian officials that the talks concerning such negotiations are meaningful.

Sergey Lavrov, the Russian minister of foreign affairs, visited Yerevan on October 3 and the Mountainous Karabagh issue was discussed. And in an interview with *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, on October 7, the Russian foreign minister said: “Armenia has great difficulties concerning communication with the outside world. It is of the Armenian people’s vital interest to unclog this situation as soon as possible. In fact, there are very few geographical and political avenues. Once the resolution of the Mountainous Karabagh problem becomes a reality, Turkey will be ready to help Armenia in establishing normal ties with the outside world and, naturally, this will occur when official and diplomatic relations between Ankara and Yerevan are established. But still two or three matters have remained unresolved—and this refers to the Lachin Corridor, in the first place.”

As we can see, the Karabagh question is included in the broader issue of establishing Armenian-Turkish relations and deblocking the border between these countries. In addition, the question with reference to the future status of the Lachin Corridor remains specifically unresolved. Hence, and without a doubt, Russia is occupied with a wide range of problems. Moreover, Russia also proposes its fairly specific vision of outlook for regional development.

In fact, it is fairly difficult to reject the view that Russia offers Baku a “strategic deal” whose objective is to reach an agreement on the deployment of Russian troops in the Karabagh conflict zone. This is a deal which, as it seems, Azerbaijan is not yet ready to accept for several reasons. First and foremost, this matter concerns a wider geographical expanse for deploying troops to the region. At least there is some information that Azerbaijan doubts the expediency of deploying foreign troops to the Caspian Basin and considers this a “loss of independence in exchange for Karabagh.” But it is hard to doubt that the Karabagh settlement plan, which is proposed by Russia, is indeed a “hand-over” of Mountainous Karabagh to Azerbaijan. And such a deal is rather possible for the sake of deploying Russian troops at the aforementioned zone.

Russia had intended to deploy its troops to the Karabagh conflict zone back when the ceasefire was established in 1994. At the time, the text of the Great Political Agreement was being prepared during the Moscow consultations between the experts from the conflicting sides. These several-month-long consultations were being held against the background of the ceasefire-agreement signed, on 12 May 1994, by the Armenian and Azerbaijani ministers of defense and the commander of Mountainous Karabagh’s army. At that period Russia already had acquired the CSCE’s mandate to deploy its troops to the conflict zone. And this circumstance allowed the holding of trilateral consultations under its aegis and the CSCE Minsk Group’s activities temporarily were paralyzed.

The talks did not bring any results until December 1994. Consequently no agreement was reached, since Mountainous Karabagh and Azerbaijan did not really want the Russian troops being deployed to the conflict zone. Furthermore, Russia’s relations became complicated with the CSCE, which insisted that a CSCE-Russia joint headquarters be formed at the conflict zone. As a result, during the CSCE’s Budapest summit Russia demanded from this organization to not interfere in the settlement process of conflicts, reasoning that the CSCE’s charter did not assume such tasks. And everything ended at the same summit, as the CSCE transformed into a peacemaking organization under the name “OSCE.”

The talks returned to the Minsk Group format in late January 1995, but this time the OSCE and Russia appeared as the co-chairs of these talks. And it was also at this time that the groundwork was laid toward excluding the other countries—the Minsk Group members—from an immediate involvement in the Group’s activities. In addition, Russia’s plans toward deploying its contingent

to Mountainous Karabagh failed and the ceasefire was secured, with a balance in the forces of the conflicting sides.

As we can see, the Russian plans to deploy its troops to the Karabagh conflict zone have a long history. And, accordingly, it is quite rational that Russia now has revived these plans. It could not seriously think about such plans prior to the events in Georgia, but after the entry of its troops into Georgia—and the warming of Russian-Turkish relations—it seems the information on such plans have started to penetrate into the press. Official statements also might be made very soon.

We must remember as well that in early July 2008 Russia and Azerbaijan already signed a declaration on strategic collaboration and this declaration included a point on carrying out a joint combat against separatism in the territories of these countries. Formally, this declaration creates the basis for the entry of Russian troops into Azerbaijan. The complicated international position of Azerbaijan and the abovementioned accordance seem to have motivated Russia. Ultimately, the prospect of a deblockage of the railway link between Armenia and Turkey is a strong trump card in Russia's hands. And for such prospect Russia will attempt to demand a high price from the countries in the region. But whether it will reach success is another issue, altogether.

In any rate, no matter how dire Armenia's situation may be, it cannot agree to the aforesaid settlement plan for the Karabagh problem. What is more, the price for the deblockage of railway in exchange for deploying Russian troops to eastern South Caucasus is too high for Turkey and Azerbaijan, alike. And here it is not even worth speaking about the position of the Western empires because they might tolerate the existence of Russian troops in Armenia but hardly, in Azerbaijan. Hence we need not wait for an easy implementation of Russia's plans in the region.

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